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ABSTRACT

A regional UNESCO seminar aimed to follow up on the goals set at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 and to contribute to the "Ten Year UN Girls' Education Initiative" (UNGEI). The seminar established three primary aims: (1) to develop a regional cooperation mechanism or network of Education for All (EFA) gender focal points, to reinforce and support countries' efforts to achieve gender equality and eliminate gender gaps in basic education; (2) to plan network activities at regional and country levels; and (3) to promote intra-regional and inter-regional exchange of ideas and information among those involved in gender equality in education. Fifteen Asian countries participated in the seminar. Welcoming speakers highlighted the urgent need for improvement in girls' education, as well as gender equality in basic education, and stressed the importance of regional cooperation in Education for All, with special reference to the preparation of national EFA action plans as stipulated in the Dakar framework for action. This seminar report contains four sections: (1) "Introduction"; (2) "Summaries of Statements and Presentations"; (3) "Regional Cooperation and Networking to Achieve Gender Equity and Equality in Basic Education"; and (4) "Conclusions and Recommendations." Annexes are: (1) "List of Participants"; (2) "Seminar Agenda"; (3) "Country Summaries"; and (4) "Opening Address." (BT)

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Towards Gender Equality in Basic Education: Major Challenges in Meeting Dakar EFA Goals.

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, Bangkok (Thailand). Regional Office for Education in Asia and the Pacific.

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Towards Gender Equality in Basic Education:

Major Challenges in Meeting Dakar EFA Goals

Regional Seminar in Asia

28-30 November 2001
Kyoto, Japan

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

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Introduction

The regional seminar on "Gender Equality in Basic Education: Major Challenges in Meeting Dakar EFA Goals" was held from 28-30 November 2001 in Kyoto, Japan. The seminar, held in cooperation with the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, aimed to follow up on the goals set at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. The seminar also aimed to contribute to the "Ten Year UN Girls' Education Initiative" (UNGEI). Furthermore, it was included in celebrations held to mark the 50th Anniversary of Japan's admission to UNESCO. These celebrations were organized by the National Federation of UNESCO Associations of Japan (NFUAJ), which also generously contributed to the organization of the seminar.

The primary aims of the seminar were:

- To develop a regional cooperation mechanism or network of EFA gender focal points, in order to reinforce and support countries' efforts to achieve gender equality and eliminate gender gaps in basic education.
- To plan network activities at regional and country levels
- To promote intra-regional and inter-regional exchange of ideas and information among those involved in gender equality in education.

Fifteen Asian countries participated in the seminar. They were Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao P.D.R, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. China had accepted the invitation, but as their nominee was unable to attend, they declined to participate in the seminar. The seminar was attended by participants from the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the World Food Program and the International Labour Organization. Local experts and a representative from the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE) served as resource persons. Observers at the seminar included representatives of the Asian Cultural Centre for UNESCO, the NFUAJ, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the National Women's Education Centre of Japan, non-government organizations (NGOs), research institutions and Japanese experts and scholars. A list of participants is contained in Annex 1 of this report.

The Executive Secretary of the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, Mr Yuzuru Imasato welcomed participants to the seminar. UNESCO's Deputy Assistant-Director General for Education, Ms Aicha Bah-Diallo[1], gave an opening address which set out the background and purpose of the seminar. Both speakers highlighted the urgent need for improvements in girls' education, as well as gender equality in basic education. They both stressed the importance of regional cooperation in Education for All, with special

1. Ms Bah-Diallo's full speech is contained in Annex 4.

reference to the preparation of National EFA Action Plans as stipulated in the Dakar Framework for Action. Their statements are included later is this report. Mr J. Nakamura, the President of the Kyoto International Conference Hall, where the seminar was held, also welcomed participants.

Following the opening session, participants adopted the programme and agenda for the seminar. Delegates also elected Ms Yoriko Meguro of Japan to chair the seminar. The vice-chairs were named as Ms Sahara Binti Ahmad of Malaysia and Mr Ram Sarobar Dube of Nepal. The seminar rapporteur was Ms P. S. Kuruppu of Sri Lanka.

The UN Girls Education Initiative

On behalf of the UNGEI Inter-agency Task Force, Ms Aicha Bah-Diallo, the UNESCO Deputy Assistant-Director General for Education, explained the objectives and mechanism of the UNGEI. The initiative is a UN system-wide collaborative scheme. It uses a unified approach to improve the quality and availability of girls' education, as an integral and essential element in global efforts to reduce poverty. Member countries take the lead in this Initiative, and UNGEI assists governments to meet their commitments in ensuring quality education for all girls in all nations. While national governments are key players in the UNGEI, the Initiative also places importance on building broad partnerships with education practitioners, NGOs, civil society and the private sector. Ms Bah-Diallo also explained its linkages with EFA and the Millennium Development Goals, both of which aim to eliminate gender disparity in primary education by 2005. UNICEF is the lead agency within UNGEI, and 12 other international entities also participate in the programme, including UNESCO, the World Bank, WFP, ILO, WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNHCR, UNIFEM, UNDP and the UN Development Group Office.

UNESCO's Strategies for Gender Equality in Basic Education

Ms Koto Kanno, a Programme Specialist with UNESCO's Division of Basic Education, presented a UNESCO Working Document entitled " Gender Equality in Basic Education: Strategic Framework." The document is one of UNESCO's contributions to UNGEI. It aims to complement the UNGEI concept paper, serves as a conceptual basis and provides practical guiding principles to pursue gender equality in basic education. The document explained the difference between gender equity and equality, with the latter aiming to make fundamental changes in gender relations based on mutual respect, dialogue and new partnerships. Furthermore, the expanded vision of Basic Education adopted at Jomtien, and reconfirmed in Dakar, underlines the necessity of openness and flexibility of education delivery systems. It also highlights the need for learner-centered lifelong education through a variety of channels and means, involving various actors. Basic education must provide an enabling environment that prevents gender-biased societies.

UNESCO's strategies for gender equality in basic education involve the following:

- Gender-responsive learning environments, which stress the need for improvements in the quality of formal and non-formal education, and better links between the two systems.

- Advocacy and raising awareness about the need for changes in education policy, to ensure the commitments of all stakeholders at national, regional and international levels.
- Support for policy development through comprehensive research and gender sensitive data collection and analysis, as well as relevant capacity building.

Presentation of Country Situation Reviews

Fifteen participants presented reviews of the situation in their countries in regards to women's and girls' education, and gender equality in basic education. Their presentations focused on:

- The general state of women and girls' education in regards to access, enrolment and survival rates in primary education, as well as the transition from primary to secondary and higher education.
- Analysis of the main challenges and obstacles in achieving gender equality and closing gender gaps in basic education, such as quality, relevance and gender sensitive school environments.
- Successful methods, best practices and solutions to problems.
- National policy and programmes on women and girls' education and governments' attitude and views towards gender equality in education.
- The preparation of National EFA Action Plans, in particular the countries' plans and strategies to achieve Dakar Goal V[2] and progress made in achieving the Goal.

Summaries of the country situation reviews are contained in Annex 3 of this report.

Major issues raised in the country situation reviews included the following:

- Gender biased materials and practices in education, the portrayal of women and men in textbooks, teachers' attitudes, and the existence of tendencies to channel students according to gender (encouraging girl students to choose "feminine" or "soft" disciplines/subjects).
- Factors which negatively affect women and girls' education, including the strength and context of economic and cultural factors.
- Physical obstacles such as long distances from home to school, geographical difficulties, the physical learning environment, the necessity for separate girls' latrines, and safety on the way to school.
- The importance of community participation and mobilization.

2. Goal V: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to, and achievement, in basic education.

- Provision of adequate resources/budget for implementation of policies and programmes.
- The need for research and gender disaggregated data, and the utilization of existing research and survey data for sound policy development.

Observations by Resource Persons

The resource persons at the seminar observed that the participating countries were well aware of the goals of the Dakar Framework for Action. They have prepared, or were in the process of preparing, National EFA Action Plans. With regard to Dakar Goal V, many countries were clear about the objective of eliminating gender gaps in primary and secondary school by 2005. However many did not discuss issues relating to the achievement of gender equality by 2015.

Resource person, Professor Ahiro Chiba, reviewed developments and trends in women and girls' education in the context of overall education in Asia. He referred to major international instruments, declarations and recommendations of world conferences since the Karachi Plan in the 1960's. Mr Chiba noted a shift in the emphasis in girls and women' education away from quantitative targets, and towards qualitative and integrated approaches. The World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien in 1990 was in fact the culmination of past efforts to provide basic education for all. He observed that a significant achievement had been made through the inclusion of specific gender related goals in the Dakar Framework of Action.

Professor Chiba also noted that non-formal education should be given due attention and the concept of "Lifelong Learning" should be promoted further. He stressed that education is not limited to school education, but also encompasses early childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Moreover, it was observed that literacy has not been given due attention in recent years, despite the fact that there is a great need and demand for literacy skills. Professor Chiba stressed that it was important to mobilize the public to ensure their views and opinions are reflected in National EFA Action Plans and national policies. The success of policy and programme implementation depends on people's will to make real changes on the ground. In this regard, Professor Chiba felt that the country review presentations failed to include views from the grassroots or community level.

It was noted that the past experiences of UNESCO indicate that regional exchanges and networking can contribute greatly to the development of education in the region. Therefore, the creation of a regional cooperation network for advancing gender equality in basic education is worthy of serious consideration

Programme Specialist with UNESCO's Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Ms Vibeke Jensen, synthesized the country reviews and offered general observations. She stressed her appreciation of their forward-looking, yet realistic viewpoints. Ms Jensen emphasized that it is necessary to take a holistic approach to the question of gender equality in education. Noting that little mention was made of early childhood education, she called for participants to be aware that gender equality issues should be tackled from early childhood. This is because gender bias and stereotyping are inculcated in the minds

of boys and girls in their early pre-school years. Their attention was also drawn to the issue of girls with disabilities, who can face "double discrimination" towards both their gender and their disability. She also discussed practical intervention strategies such as incentives and scholarships, which could impact positively on girls' education if designed and monitored correctly. The question of school retention rates was noted as worthy of serious consideration. Even if girls go to school, and complete it, they may not be given opportunities to use their acquired knowledge and skills. Improving quality and relevance is therefore a key issue in girls' education.

Many bilateral international cooperation partners have attached a high priority to girls' education. Effective cooperation and collaboration with them should be seriously explored, while cooperation with NGOs on small scale projects should also be given due attention. Good practices and useful experiences should be shared among experts and practitioners across the region. It was further noted that most participants had based their assessments and monitoring on figures from the overall national level. While this is useful, it is also necessary to obtain micro-level data through surveys at urban and rural levels. It was also suggested that monitoring and evaluation should include qualitative assessment. Ms Jensen also touched upon issues which impact upon female teachers, and noted concerns that female teachers are not always gender sensitive and responsive. Moreover, she underlined the importance of teacher training in order to increase the number of female educators at the managerial level.

In addition, the participants expressed the following issues and concerns:

- The provision of free textbooks and uniforms did not necessarily contribute to improving female enrollment rates. For example in Cambodia and Bhutan the distance to school and poverty were the main obstacles to girls' schooling.
- More emphasis should be placed on early childhood education. However, some countries such as India, Cambodia and Bhutan said that early childhood education was not given higher priority in government programmes, due to financial constraints and other more pressing needs.
- Many countries adopted the strategy of increasing the number of female teachers in order to raise girls' enrollment rates. This was based on the hypothesis that female teachers are more gender-sensitive and that they would encourage girls to go, and stay, in school. However, many expressed serious concerns that female teachers are not always gender sensitive and responsive. Some of them have strong gender biases.
- A question of boys' education was raised by a participant from the Philippines, where girls often out-perform boys in mathematics at the primary level. While serious research and analysis are required into this phenomenon, concerns were expressed about the fact that in the Philippines, 94 per cent of teachers are female, and may tend to encourage girls rather than boys to choose this subject.
- Participants stressed the need for gender responsive teacher training and resources for use in formal education programmes. In the Philippines, training manuals for teachers were found to be very useful, and will be shared with other countries. A representative from the Asian Cultural Center for UNESCO (ACCU) also discussed a self-instruction module in non-formal education that could prove useful.

- Participants pointed out the need for development of indicators, monitoring systems and common standards to measure achievements in gender equality in education, and requested that UNESCO provide support in these areas.
- Caution was expressed about over-emphasizing girls' education in the context of their future roles as mothers. The inter-generational impact of girls' education is undeniable. Nevertheless, to consider girls' education solely from the point of view of educating future mothers would only reinforce the status quo and gender stereotyping. At the same time, the importance of educational programmes for illiterate mothers should be promoted, in order to enhance the quality of life that both they and their families enjoy. The need to share responsibilities between parents and the active participation of fathers in family education and early childhood education was noted.

Experiences in Regional Cooperation in Africa

Dr. Mariama Sarr-Ceesay, from the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), spoke about her organization's experiences in regional networking as a means to promote the education of girls and women in Africa. She discussed FAWE's regional cooperation mechanism, which involves networking by national chapters on strategies and activities both at the regional and country levels. These activities mainly relate to education policy, advocacy and interventions on specific issues.

Delegates were keen to hear about FAWE's operations, management and fund raising activities. Currently FAWE's regional cooperation measures are based on a vertical structure of organization between its secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya and national chapters throughout Africa. FAWE facilitates information sharing within and between chapters. The members of the chapters include ministries of education, other ministries and policy makers, but most of the members are educators. FAWE's activities are often inter-sectoral. For instance, ministries of finance are involved as they facilitate money raising. However, this can also create problems because the ministry in question may want to use the funds for purposes, or in a manner, which conflict with FAWE's original plans.

Some participants expressed interest in teaching materials produced by FAWE, which include education packages that introduce girls and women to the concept of sexuality and reproductive health. FAWE has also implemented a pilot project on HIV/AIDS. Dr Sarr-Ceesay also discussed the practice of early marriage, which is common in parts of Africa and Asia. She outlined some measures taken to prevent early marriage, and to ensure married girls have access to education. She noted that a FAWE center in Kenya had helped to achieve a significant decrease in the number of early marriages in its region, by influencing parents and mobilizing the community.

FAWE's activities, in particular its Centers of Excellence, generated great interest among the seminar participants. The Centers provide disadvantaged girls with access to education and create a school environment conducive for learning.

Experiences in Promoting Gender Equality in Basic Education in Guatemala

Ms Keiko Mizuno, formerly of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, discussed a project on gender equality in basic education in Guatemala. The main factors found to influence girls' education in Guatemala were the school, family and community environments, and educational administration. She stressed the importance of active interaction and collaboration between school, teachers and families.

Ms Mizuno and the delegates discussed methodological issues relating to factor analysis and qualitative analysis of quantitative data. While the issue of objectivity is always relevant to the interpretation of data, it was agreed that qualitative analysis is useful in defining core issues.

The links between school feeding or school lunch programs and girls' school attendance were discussed. It was found that while there is no direct "cause and effect" relationship between the two, school feeding can be a useful part of girls' education programmes.

Girls' Education and the World Food Programme

Ms Annette Heller, from the WFP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, presented the agency's activities aimed at promoting girls' education in developing countries, such as school feeding and take home programmes[3] targeted at poverty stricken and under-developed areas. WFP's support for school feeding programmes is limited to the least developed countries (LDCs) or countries with low gross domestic product (GDP). However, the agency can provide technical support to governments in other countries who wish to start national school feeding programmes.

In response to queries about whether school feeding programmes might carry the risk of creating unwanted dependency, Ms Heller explained that the WFP's school feeding programmes are conducted on the basis of thorough needs assessment surveys and research. The methods and strategies used to implement the programme are adopted according to local contexts, in order to ensure the service reaches the right target population. The WFP works closely with governments when implementing school feeding programmes.

The Women's Information Network for Asia and the Pacific

ESCAP social affairs officer, Ms Yuki Hori, gave a speech on the Women's Information Network for Asia and the Pacific (WINAP), which was established in 1986. WINAP's recent activities have focused on strengthening information sharing in the region and building capacity in women's organizations, through the use of information communication technologies (ICT). Ms Hori pointed out the importance of:

- Combining existing social and technological capabilities to fully utilize the benefits of ICTs
- ICT content development

3. Take home programmes provide female students with food rations, which they can take home to help cover the opportunity costs of sending them to school.

- Regional cooperation
- ICTs as tools for outreach at the national level

The participants discussed their experiences and views on the capacity and preparedness of their countries to use ICTs for regional networking. Participants expressed concerns about a growing "digital divide" between rich and poor countries. They noted that rapid advances in ICTs and the fast pace of globalization could widen the gaps which already exist between "Haves" and "Have Nots".

Ms Hiroko Hashimoto, a former ESCAP Programme Specialist responsible for WINAP, provided information about WINAP's initial operations. In particular, she discussed training activities and cooperation with network members and partners, such as the National Women's Education Center in Japan, to build up or reinforce national capacities in documentation and information sharing.

Programmes of the National Women's Education Centre (Japan)

Ms Hiroe Nakano, a senior researcher at the National Women's Education Centre (NWEC) in Japan, delivered a presentation on activities to promote women's education. NWEC's programmes include gender sensitization training of educators engaged in women's education, research into women's education and family education, promotion of women's and gender studies, an information clearing house, and capacity building for information exchanges and networking. Ms Nakano also explained the Centre's administrative status, its sources of funding, and its cooperation with JICA on certain international or regional activities.

UNESCO Asia-Pacific Programme on Education for All (APPEAL)

Ms Vibeke Jensen, a UNESCO Programme Specialist and Regional Gender Focal Point, briefed participants about UNESCO's activities to promote gender equality in basic education under the Asian Pacific Programme for Education for All (APPEAL). Over the past five years, APPEAL has focused on analyzing national strategies to increase girls' enrolment and retention in primary education. APPEAL has also concentrated its work on analyzing existing implementation mechanisms for those strategies and their shortcomings. The focus has been on South Asia, which has the biggest problems in terms of gender disparities. Research into policies has found that governments are good at formulating objectives and designing strategies. However, there are weaknesses in terms of follow-up and the monitoring of progress towards meeting objectives. There is therefore a need to increase attention on the actual implementation of policies and strategies, and the design of appropriate monitoring mechanisms. Ms Jensen also discussed a series of ongoing studies aimed at identifying best practices at community learning centers which promote gender equality.

Participants raised questions about the funding needed to implement UNESCO's recommendations. UNESCO's operational activities are largely financed by extra-budgetary sources. Concerns were aired that the question of financing, though essential, is often neglected at regional gatherings. UNESCO's regional programmes have received

extra-budgetary contributions from a few governments within and outside the region. While their continuous cooperation is to be solicited, it would be desirable to expand cooperation with a diversity of partners.

ILO IPEC Presentation

During the informal session on 29 November, Ms Eriko Kiuchi, an Associate Expert of the ILO Mekong sub-regional project to combat trafficking in children and women, made a short presentation on the work on girls' education carried out by the International Programme on Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). Her presentation addressed the links between education, gender and child labour. The following points were mentioned:

- Education is one of the solutions most favoured by all sectors involved in the struggle against child labour.
- IPEC's experience shows that education offered to working children should be of practical use and enable them to combine school and work.
- More efforts need to be made to address the special concerns of girls and to increase girls' education for the elimination of child labour.
- IPEC's goal in girls' education is to withdraw girls from hazardous and exploitative work and to ensure they receive a quality education.
- IPEC's strategies for girls' education include mainstreaming gender issues into project and evaluation activities, promoting girls' education through campaign activities, building alliances with key partners and media, supporting efforts of institutions in regards to multi-delivery systems, and training more female teachers.

A concrete example of the IPEC project, which has educational and gender components, is the Mekong sub-regional project to combat trafficking in children and women. The following points were made in regards to this project:

- Factors determining trafficking are complex, and include low levels of education, lack of information and innocence.
- The Trafficking in Women and Children (TICW) project focuses on 'prevention' of trafficking through various interventions, including the provision of education and skills training as one of the alternatives to trafficking for labour exploitation.

ILO materials on education and gender in Asia were distributed. It was stressed that IPEC aims to contribute to a new vision in educational policy worldwide, which includes the prevention of child labour as one of the objectives of the education system itself. The links between education and issues of child labour are still regarded as weak at all levels.

Regional Cooperation and Networking to Achieve Gender Equity and Equality in Basic Education

The participants were divided into two groups to discuss and identify current needs, desirable strategies and actions needed at the regional level to eliminate gender disparities and achieve gender equality as stipulated in the Dakar Framework for Action. The main points made during the group presentations are set out below, followed by a summary of the discussions and questions they generated.

Group one: East and Southeast Asia

This group outlined its needs in order to achieve gender equality and eliminate gender disparities as:

1. Elimination of poverty
2. Higher premiums on education
3. Accessibility of education
4. Recognition of the merit of educating girls
5. Gender sensitivity of stake holders and in the curriculum

To meet these needs, the group recommended the following activities:

- Provision of incentives for children to go to school
- Mass media advocacy on gender equality
- Training and seminars on gender sensitivity
- Regular dialogue on gender sensitivity
- Preparation of training materials and curriculum material on gender equality
- Adoption of alternative learning systems
- National policy and political will to educate women
- Networking with NGOs to address identified needs

Furthermore, the following cooperation is needed at the regional level:

- A regular regional annual forum
- ICT training
- Electronic networking
- Exchange of information, research and so on
- Put the training manuals of the Philippines on the web within six months

Group two: South Asia (SAARC Sub-region)

This group agreed that the ultimate goal for the Sub-region is to achieve "Universal Primary Education and Gender Equality in Basic Education." In order to attain the goal the following mutual objectives were set:

1. To share available expertise, including individual experts and institutions
2. To build linkages between institutions
3. To exchange information
4. To organize study visits, regional seminars, workshops and meetings

The following two strategies were suggested as a means of meeting the objectives:

- Identify the country focal points for regional networking by preparing country briefs on best practices, institutions, individuals and NGOs.
- Share gender sensitive manuals and modules, models of Non-Formal Education, equivalency courses, gender sensitive supplementary reading material and National EFA Action Plans.

Coordination within Countries

Regional networking can function effectively only with the existence of proper coordination within the participating countries themselves. Activities relating to gender equality in education are inter-sectoral and involve different government departments (health, labour, social development etc.), as well as NGOs and educational institutions. It is therefore important that networks within the country covers three groups - namely policy makers, researchers and practitioners.

Country Focal Points

The location of the Focal Point can vary from one country to another. Considering institutional continuity and comparative advantages, the office within the government with responsibility for gender equality in education, or its equivalent, would be a suitable country focal point. The Focal Point will have two functions. Firstly, it will be the contact point for the regional network and the member countries. However, when there is regional cooperation and collaboration in specific areas, the concerned experts or entities will represent the country. Secondly, it will be the coordinator of country level activities and collect relevant information, so as to make the best use of available expertise and resources.

Methods of Networking

Electronic networking is considered helpful and less costly than other means of networking. UNESCO's Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, offered to host a website for the regional network. The website would contain useful and relevant information, such as the country review reports presented at the seminar and best practices. Information sharing through the website would allow access for a wide range of people beyond country boundaries. However, it was suggested that close monitoring

of the content of the site would be necessary. Some concerns were also expressed about local capacity and infrastructure problems in regards to using the website.

The participants also noted the need for regular and direct contact with other network partners through an annual meeting of the regional network, in order to maintain momentum in regional cooperation.

Gender Sensitivity and Responsiveness

The participants found that "Gender Equality" was interpreted differently in different contexts. The concepts of "gender" and "equality" were not yet clearly understood by many in the region. Some regard "equality" only from the point of view of parity and closing gaps. Some participants also expressed caution about the use of the term "gender equality" as it was perceived to be a delicate issue for some cultures.

The participants' attention was also drawn to the fact that those who are gender-sensitive do not necessarily take action on the issue. It is important to ensure gender *responsive* action is taken.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recognizing the fact that gender equity and equality in basic education are the keys to achieving the Dakar EFA Goals, and with the aim of mainstreaming gender concerns in basic education, the participants of the Regional Seminar in Asia "Towards Gender Equality in Basic Education" made the following conclusions:

1. Regional cooperation needs to be strengthened in order to achieve the gender equity and equality goals stipulated in the Dakar Framework for Action.
2. Better coordination is required among concerned ministries, gender experts, educators and civil society at the country level, to ensure a multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach.
3. Gender-sensitive and gender-responsive learning should take place at all stages of life, starting from birth, through early childhood, adolescence and adulthood.
4. In order to avoid duplication of work, there is a need to include gender-specific work in broader EFA efforts. A regional network was proposed to share experiences and good practices in mainstreaming gender in education.
5. Acknowledging the diverse situation in the region, further efforts are required to attain both quantitative and qualitative goals.
6. It was stressed that a sense of ownership and a spirit of partnership are vital to the success of any cooperative venture.
7. Regular monitoring and assessment of actions need to be undertaken.

In the light of the above conclusions, the following **short-term actions** were proposed:

- Participants will report the results and recommendations of the seminar to their superiors and the concerned ministries, departments and offices. This will be done in order to reconfirm their commitments to the Dakar EFA Goals, particularly Goal V, and ensure follow up activities to pursue regional cooperation and country level coordination.
- The results of the regional seminar will be transmitted to the regional EFA coordinators' meetings.
- UNESCO is prepared to provide technical assistance to the national EFA planning teams in member countries/economies, in order to ensure gender-sensitive and gender-responsive EFA Plans, if and when requested by governments.
- A national focal point should be identified and/or confirmed for the proposed regional network in each participating country, and the name and the office address should be submitted to UNESCO Bangkok. In the meantime, the participants of the seminar will serve as contact points for the network.

- As proposed by the group, UNESCO Bangkok will create a website, which contains the country situation review papers presented at the seminar, as well as examples of good practices, information concerning resource persons and institutions, research works, examples of gender mainstreaming in education, examples of gender responsive EFA Plans and so on. Active involvement and contribution of the national focal points will be solicited in order to ensure the successful operation of the website.
- Existing programmes and networks will be identified in order for the proposed regional network to link up and explore possible joint activities.

Moreover, the following **recommendations** were agreed to:

- Regular regional meetings should be held to monitor and assess progress and achievements.
- Recognizing that contributions by the national focal points, and country level coordination and networking, are essential for successful electronic networking at the regional level, UNESCO, other multilateral and bilateral international cooperation partners and the interested national institutions will be encouraged to provide assistance in building and strengthening relevant national capacities. In particular, ICT training should be made available.
- In order to realize gender-sensitive and gender-responsive basic education and learning, efforts should be intensified to transform awareness into commitments and action.
- Available expertise and resources within the region should be fully utilized through exchanges of experts and linkages of institutions.
- Increased efforts are required to ensure inclusion of gender equality in education in the agenda of major regional meetings, in particular those at the senior policy makers' level.
- Mass media should be mobilized for advocacy and sensitization at all levels.
- Alternative learning methods and gender-sensitive and responsive learning environments should be promoted, to enhance the participation of women and girls in education.
- Regional and/or sub-regional joint research activities may be conducted to analyze the root cause of gender biases and discrimination, for sound policy formulation and its effective implementation, and for designing relevant and useful actions.
- A small working group may be formed among like-minded contact persons/focal points in order to plan network activities, for which extra-budgetary cooperation will be explored.

Annex 1

List of Participants

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Annex 2

Seminar Agenda

28 November (Day 1)

09.00 – 09.45	Opening: • Welcome addresses by the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO • Remarks by the President of Kyoto International Conference Hall • Opening statement by the DADG/ED, UNESCO
09.45 – 10.00	Coffee break
10.00 – 10.15	Election of Chair, and rapporteur, adoption of Agenda, and introduction of the programme of the meeting
10.15 – 11.00	UNICEF: Ten year's UN Girls Education Initiative UNESCO: Dakar Follow-up and Gender Equality in Basic Education – UNESCO's strategies and future direction
11.00 – 12.00	Country presentation: Challenges and Progress in Eliminating Gender Disparities and Achieving Gender Equality (Dakar EFA Goal V)
12.00 – 13.15	Lunch
13.15 – 15.00	Country presentation: • Challenges and Progress in Eliminating Gender Disparities and Achieving Gender Equality (Dakar EFA Goal V)
15.00 –15.15	Coffee break
15.15 – 16.30	Country presentation: • Progress in the Preparation of the National EFA Plans for Eliminating Gender Disparity and Achieving Gender Equality

28 November (Day 1) (cont'd)

16.30 –17.30	Discussions:

- Major Issues in Gender Equality and Equity at Country Level - Common Features and Different Challenges in the Region.

18.30 Reception

29 November (Day 2)

09.00 – 10.00 Regional Co-operation in Gender Equality in Education – Experiences in Africa: FAWE (presentation and Q & A)

10.00 – 11.00 Gender Equality in Basic Education – A Case in Guatemala, Latin American Experiences by a former JICA Expert.

11.00 – 12.00 Regional Co-operation Programmes in Asia:

- Women's Information Network in Asia and the Pacific (WINAP, UN-ESCAP), the Regional Programme of the National Women's Education Centre in Japan, and School Feeding Programme of WFP

12.00 –13.30 Lunch

Regional co-operation and exchanges in EFA – Gender Equality in Education, Needs and Possible future activities

13.30 – 17.00 Group Discussions on Regional Co-operation and Networking – its framework and activities

17.30 – 18.00 Informal Session:

- Presentation of the regional activities on Basic Education for Girls and Women by Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU), ILO, National Women's Education Centre and the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan.

30 November (Day 3)

09.00 - 10.15 Regional activity plans, and country follow-up: presentation of the group discussions

10.15 – 10.30 Coffee break

10.30 – 12.00	Conclusions: ▪ Regional Network for EFA-Gender Focal Points and Experts in Asia ▪ Establishment of a Regional Network and Activity Plan for 2002/3.
12.00 – 12.30	Closing

Bangladesh

Nearly 16 per cent of the Bangladesh national budget goes to the education sector. Fifty per cent of that amount is devoted to the primary and non-formal education sectors. Since 1992, primary education has been universal and compulsory for children aged between six and ten years. The Women in Development Unit (WID) was established in 1991, and produces calendars, posters, videocassettes and leaflets to create awareness and to mobilize people about gender development. A WID Focal Point has been nominated at the ministerial and the directorate levels in order to ensure gender equality. The overall literacy rate is 64 per cent, with males having a literacy rate of 72 per cent and females 56 per cent. The gross enrolment rate is 96 per cent. Bangladesh has surpassed its own EFA target of 95 per cent. According to the gross enrolment rate for 2000, Bangladesh has already achieved gender equality in enrolment at the primary level. The rate of boys and girls is 51 and 49 per cent respectively, which is also the sex distribution of the population. The drop out rate is 23 per cent. Our main challenge is to sustain gender parity. Satellite schools are solely staffed by female teachers. Sixty per cent of overall teaching posts are reserved for female teachers. The percentage of female teachers stands at 34 per cent.

Intensive programmes like the Food for Education Programme, stipend programmes and the introduction of free education for girls in the rural areas up to class VIII have had a notable effect on enrolment and retention of girls in schools. Community participation at the management level encourages parents to send their children to school. The supply of textbooks free of charge has increased enrolment in primary education. Curricula have been revised. Discriminatory concepts about boys and girls have been eliminated. Social mobilization programme has been undertaken. Child Welfare Schools have been established in urban areas for working children. These schools hold classes at flexible hours to enable working children to attend. They offer schooling from grade I to V. This provides a linkage between non-formal and formal education. These students can enrol in a formal school for higher studies. Textbooks and stationary materials are supplied free of cost. Principal infrastructure has been created, including separate toilets for girls. Now our main thrust is on improving the quality of education. Massive programmes on non-formal education have been undertaken using the Total Library Movement (TLM) approach. A minimum of 50 per cent of the total TLM literacy centers will enrol only female learners. Female enrolment is around 60 per cent of the total enrolment. Female

supervisors are recruited for female centers. Gender issues have been addressed in the adult literacy programmes. A gender action plan is being formulated.

There is a two-way link between formal and non-formal education. As stipulated in the Dakar Framework for Action, a National EFA Action Plan is being re-examined and strengthened. This exercise will be completed by the end of 2001. Six theme papers have been prepared as input into the revised National EFA Action Plan. Education for girls is one of those six theme papers.

Two national workshops were organized with the participation of stakeholders at different levels. One disseminated the Dakar Framework of Action and the other finalized the outlines of the six theme papers. A series of workshops is planned before the finalization of the National EFA Action Plan. An outline of future programmes covering a period of five years has been developed. The government's sixth Five Year Plan (2002-07) is under preparation and will reflect this outline. One of the major elements of the outline of the plan for the next five years is to reduce the gender gap and regional imbalances.

Bangladesh has achieved gender parity in primary education. To sustain this, and also to achieve parity in secondary and higher education, Bangladesh continues to need technical and financial support from our development partners on a long-term basis.

As already mentioned, Bangladesh has involved all stakeholders such as NGOs, civil society and women's organization from the national to grass-roots levels to achieve the Dakar EFA Goals.

It would be useful to develop a regional cooperation networking mechanism for mutual strengthening of interventions to achieve gender equality. For example, a network could be developed among the SARC (South Asian Regional Co-operation) countries (Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives) to share information on experiences, success stories, constraints etc. This cooperation will help each country to improve its own situation. The easiest way would be to establish networking through information technology, the holding of international workshops and seminars, and so on.

Bhutan

Bhutan's education rates and indications are as follows:

- GPER – 72% (boys), 62% (girls)
- NPER – 54% (boys), 48% (girls)
- Survival rate at primary level – 69%(boys), 73.6% (girls)
- Survival rate at grade VIII (9 years of education) – 54.5% (boys), 57.7% (girls)
- Repetition rate – 12% (same for boys and girls)
- Drop out rate – 4.7% (same for boys and girls)

The lower enrolment rate of girls is not due to discrimination, but to economic and physical factors. In Bhutan, both boys and girls have equal rights to free education from pre-primary to the tertiary level. There are no separate standards set for boys and girls in

curriculum, examinations, equipment, etc. There are also no standards for selection of girls and women for higher studies or employment.

Improvements in access to education for girls will be covered by the following goals:

- UPE by 2007
- Full enrolment until grade 10 by 2012
- Full adult literacy by 2012

The main challenges in the provision of education are difficult terrain and scattered dwellings, marginalized populations, a shortage of resources and teacher shortages.

The main strategies are:

- The expansion of primary education, by building more primary schools with community participation
- The expansion of secondary education, by upgrading schools and facilities
- The expansion of teacher training colleges
- The enhancement of the quality of education
- The strengthening of adult literacy programmes
- Increased boarding facilities for girls

Cambodia

In 1998, the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS) established a National Task Force on Girl's Education. Its work was carried out over a six month period and resulted in a Regional Survey on Girl's Education in Cambodia and a Draft National Action Plan on Girl's Education (1998-2003).

There are significant inequities in the representations of females in the education system. There is a significant drop in the promotion of enrolled girls in the later grades of the primary school system. The share of girls falls from 47 per cent in Grade 1 to 32 per cent in Grade 8. Girls represent about one-third of total enrolments in secondary schools. Females are also significantly under-represented in technical and higher education.

These outcomes are a combination of a number of social, cultural and economic factors. Firstly, although girls enrol roughly at the same age as boys, earlier dropout occurs with the onset of puberty and as family responsibilities begin to predominate. Secondly, it is reported that parents are often less willing to invest in educating females.

Similar gender disparities are evident in the education service. Male teachers represent 63 per cent and 73 per cent of the primary and secondary teaching force respectively. At the managerial and administrative levels, men represent 73 per cent of the total number. In the provisional and district education offices, males represent around 80 per cent of total staffing. In many instances, females are concentrated in lower level secretarial and support staff duties. The main factor is the low proportion of women with the required academic and professional qualifications for high level and teaching positions.

One strategy to improve gender equity is an awareness campaign and possible regulations to encourage girls to enrol at the official entry age. A second strategy is an incentive program for girls from poor families. An associated strategy could be linking the

proposed incentive scheme with a targeted school-feeding program. The long-term strategy should be to gradually assume equitable access to secondary and post secondary education, possibly linked to short-term affirmative action in promoting qualified female education personnel.

In terms of the national commitment to EFA, a National EFA committee has been established, with an inter-ministerial working group in change of the elimination of gender disparities in basic education. In the MOEYS, a Gender Working Group has been set up to address mainstreaming of EFA goals in the MOEYS agenda. In December 2001, the MOEYS Gender Working Group will draft the five year Gender Mainstreaming Strategy in Education for 2002-2006.

Technical assistances needed is needed for capacity building on the design, implementation and monitoring of the Girls' Education Programme.

In order to promote regional cooperation and networking, the following points are suggested:

- Regular forums to exchange experiences about development initiatives and best practices in promoting girls' access to education, and how to mainstream gender issues in education institutions and systems.
- National and regional monitoring approaches and strategies in support of EFA gender equity goals, including gender equity indicators and data base management.
- Information and advocacy campaigns on gender equitable education.

Indonesia

In the year 2001, national data indicated that 20 per cent of 10-year-old children do not go to school. Girls make up roughly 75 per cent of those who do not go to school. There are also higher numbers of illiterate women and men in rural areas. Girls leave the education system quicker than boys do. The net primary schools enrolment rate was 95.2 per cent in 1999/2000. Gender gaps at junior and senior secondary and tertiary levels are closing, but at junior and senior secondary level, boys have higher gross enrolment, survival and completion rates.

Indonesia is creating a national team to deal with EFA. A work plan and strategy is being designed to provide education services for people living in remote areas, low income street children, boat people, the disabled and nomads.

Japan

Japan's enactment of the Basic Law for Gender Equal Society (1999) and the Basic Law for Gender Equal Society (2000) has reinforced national policy on gender equality in education. At the beginning of the 21st century, great progress has been made in achieving gender equity. However, it is recognized that many challenges for gender equality remain under the system which divides gender roles into breadwinner or housewife.

In regards to further cooperation in the region and within each country, there is a need to develop a "methodology of dialogue" between traditional education experts and gender experts, as well as between policy makers, researchers and practitioners.

Republic of Korea

There are no gender gaps in regards to access to elementary and secondary education, but gender gaps still exist in access to higher education. In regards to courses at secondary vocational education, colleges and universities, female students still tend to opt for fields traditionally recognized as female fields, such as teaching, nursing and home economics. The rates of female teachers at all levels of school have increased, but female educational administrators have not increased in accordance with the increase in numbers of female teachers.

In the last decade, Korea has established legal and administrative foundations for gender equal education. Some significant measures have been taken to achieve gender equality in education based on the 1st Basic Plan on Women's Policy.

Lao P.D.R.

Lao P.D.R. is made up of many small villages, with less than 20 per cent of the population concentrated in urban areas. Only 35 per cent of primary schools can offer a complete five-year primary education. The remaining 65 per cent operate with multi-grade classes.

In remote areas and in very poor ethnic minority villages, illiteracy for both men and women is very high. Over 40 per cent of households do not speak Lao at home. Their main concern is family poverty, especially as girl children have to assist their parents by working at home. The fact that they do not go to school is a big challenge.

The Lao P.D.R. government has placed education at the center of national strategies for human resource development, but it is a poor country. With insufficient funds for education, achieving gender equality and equity is another major challenge.

A cooperative project is planned by the LAO P.D.R., the Asian Development Bank and Ausaid to address high illiteracy rates among women and lower participation by girls compared to boys in basic education. The project aims to expand access to improved education for girls in ethnic minority areas through the provision of village-based, multi-grade primary schools, better-targeted quality interventions in both multi-grade and full-grade complete primary schools in minority areas, and improved system efficiencies.

The long-term objective of the project is to bring more women into the mainstream of socio-economic development by progressively improving their educational level. In the short term, the overall project objective is to expand access to improved primary education for girls in ethnic minority areas. Boys will also benefit, but the major educational gains will be for girls.

Other complementary projects funded by the World Bank and UNICEF deal with early childhood education, basic primary education and development for women and families. These projects address different issues concerning community participation, multi-grade teaching and strengthening of local capacity for planning and management.

Gender Ethnic Minority Education was established with the specific purpose of coordinating efforts to improve gender equity in basic education.

Lao P.D.R. is in the early stages of implementing multi-grade teaching. The sharing of experiences is needed in this field, as well as in other alternative approaches for providing education in difficult situations and in particular, alternative methods for improving gender equity in situations such as that faced by Lao P.D.R. In ethnic minority villages that are remote and very poor, it is difficult to convince villagers to send their daughters to school. Lao P.D.R. wishes to learn about experiences in other countries with similar issues on ways to overcome this problem.

Nepal

The importance of empowering women and creating equality between men and women in all walks of life have to be prerequisites for a just and developed nation. During the decade since the restoration of democracy in 1990 (coinciding with the Education for All campaign), His Majesty's government of Nepal has framed the development of the education system through a variety of documents. These include the basic and primary education master plan (1991-2001), which addresses most of the goals of education for all. During the execution of the plan (now in its second phase and called BPEP-II), several interventions have been made to eliminate gender factors in education. The mid-term evaluation of the BPEP-II will be done within nine months time. Meanwhile the education for all plan for 2002 is under preparation. Based on the mid-term review of BPEP-II and the EFA Plan 2002, required revisions in strategies will be introduced in basic and primary education in order to EFA goals by 2015.

The Philippines

The Philippines has been a pace setter in regards to gender equality and equity. Over the past ten years, equality between men and women has been ensured by the passage of several laws. Women have gained expanded representation in the government, in military academies, in business and in civil society. Crimes against women are severely punished.

The Philippine Education for All goals on participation and literacy rates were satisfactorily met. However, the goals on early childhood care and development, and on improving internal efficiency and learning outcomes have remained risk areas.

Advocacy to create a more friendly learning environment with the participation of non-government agencies/organizations gave birth to a new alternative learning system that links formal education with informal and non-formal education. The Non-formal Education-Accreditation and Equivalency System of the Philippines is a breakthrough in bridging the gap between the rich and poor, between men and women, and between all children, including those with disabilities. Delivery of educational services in various modalities is assured.

The revision of textbook and instructional materials, as well as the training of teachers and key officials to make them more gender-sensitive, paved the way for the humanization of the basic education curriculum. Male and female, and children, despite any disabilities, acquire the same knowledge, competencies and attitudes.

The modest accomplishments of the Philippines towards gender equality and equity could further improve if the local media would support and advocate for a genuine gender-sensitive society.

Sri Lanka

The following points relate to the current status of education in Sri Lanka:

- Education is free from grade 1 to tertiary level.
- Free education has made a remarkable contribution to social development in the country.
- There are equal opportunities for every citizen of Sri Lanka to enter the formal education system.
- Male literacy rate is 90.5 per cent (1981).
- Female literacy rate is 82.8 per cent (1981).
- There are no significant differences between male and female literacy rates and achievement levels.
- Sri Lanka has a widespread network of 10080 government schools.
- There are disparities among these schools.
- Popular, prestigious schools with full facilities are situated in urban centers, while rural students lack access to the facilities provided in urban popular schools.
- Survival rates for grades: 96.7 per cent for boys and 96.2 per cent for girls.
- Total enrolment rate: 50.1per cent for girls.

- There is a trend in gender equality in age specific participation rates. Age specific participation rates in the 5-14 age group are 89.5 per cent for girls and 89.4 per cent for boys.
- In the age group of 15-19, the age specific participation rate for girls is 55.3 per cent and 53.4 per cent for boys
- More boys have more opportunities in the job market.
- Enrolment to grades 12-13 is higher for girls.
- More boys enrol in science streams while more girls enter arts streams.

In regards to the main challenge and obstacles, school mapping in Sri Lanka has affected access to education for both genders, but is more prominent in the case of females. Children in plantation areas and war-affected areas have problems entering the basic education system. The socialization process within the family and school still promotes gender role stereotypes.

In regards to national policy and programmes on girls' education, free education is provided up to university level. Sri Lanka ratified the charter on the rights of child in 1990. Sri Lanka accepted the world declaration on EFA, and introduced literacy centers. In 1997, parliament enacted compulsory education for the 5-14 age group. Educational reforms implemented from 1998 emphasize equity and equality in education and EFA.

Technical and financial assistance are need to improve and maintain programmes for out of school children, especially for street children and children in war affected areas.

Regional cooperation could be boosted through regular meetings, seminars and workshops to exchange experiences and discuss problems.

Thailand

The current education situation in Thailand is as follows:

- The intake rate and enrolment ratio of boys is higher than girls, and the disparity gets slightly wider every year.
- Girls are better than boys in efficiency of education, such as completion rates, transition rates and repetition rates.
- Girls with disabilities have less opportunity to access basic education than boys.

The major supports include the distribution of schools in almost every village. There are model schools, such as the child-friendly school and learning-reform schools, nationwide. There are many programmes to help disadvantage children. The law stipulates many conditions in terms of gender equality, and discipline in education and budgeting.

Thailand faces challenges in regards to ensuring all children have access to good quality basic education, especially disadvantage groups such as disabled girls. Thailand needs to develop the Management Information System and raise awareness among key stakeholders. Resources must also be mobilized.

Thailand needs financial support to raise awareness and to conduct research on gender equality. It also needs technical support to extend and widen education services.

Regional cooperation should include the exchange of information on good experiences and best practices. A regional program should focus on common needs.

Vietnam

Throughout our history, education has been highly valued among Vietnamese people, and equal access to education for women and men is enshrined in the constitution. The government has undertaken significant efforts to provide basic literacy for adults and primary education for children, especially for women and girls.

Over the last decade, Vietnam has achieved very creditable progress in education. Nearly 97 per cent of the population of 15 years-of-age and over is literate. All of the provinces and cities have achieved the national standard for illiteracy eradication and primary school universalization. The average number of years of school attendance is 7.3. Gender differences in primary school are small and the quality of basic education has been gradually improving. In the labour force, around six per cent of working-age women have technical training, while for men it is nine per cent. Women are over-represented in areas of training and education such as pedagogy and school sciences, while male students dominate in technical disciplines.

Three gender issues in education have been identified:

1. The rate of girls attending primary and lower secondary education is low in poor and ethnic minority areas.
2. School textbooks reflect and reinforce gender stereotypes.
3. Women are segregated in certain fields of study and inadequately prepared to participate in the labour market.

The above problems are influenced by the fact that laws and policies do not address the specific needs of girl children, and standard statistical information on education tends not to be desegregated by sex. A number of financial issues restrict the participation of girls from poor, remote and ethnic minority areas. There is a lack of school buildings and poor school facilities. Social awareness on gender issues is limited. Education and policy makers are not sensitive to the role of gender in education.

To overcome these challenges, some solutions are underway in Vietnam. Policy makers are developing understanding and concern about the specific education needs and interests of girls. Education statistics are being desegregated by sex. Means are being identified to reduce girls' drop out rates at lower secondary level. School textbooks and curriculum are being revised to reflect gender equality. Improvements are being made in the gender sensitivity of teachers. Scholarships are provided for women to study in technical fields. Legislation is being developed to restrict sex discrimination in the workplace.

Annex 4

Opening Address

by the UNESCO Deputy Assistant Director-General for Education

Mr Imasato, the Executive Secretary of the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, distinguished guests, participants, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I have the privilege to welcome all of you, on behalf of the Director General of UNESCO, to the UNESCO Regional Seminar Towards Gender Equality in Basic Education: Major Challenges in Meeting the Dakar EFA Goals.

Allow me to express our sincere gratitude to the Government of Japan for agreeing to host this regional seminar in this beautiful ancient capital of Japan, Kyoto. I would also like to express my heartfelt salutation to the people and the Government of Japan on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the admission of the country to UNESCO. Throughout these fifty years, Japan has always been a close partner and one of the most active Member States of UNESCO in promoting education, culture, communication and sciences. I am extremely happy to associate myself, through this UNESCO seminar, with this important commemorative occasion.

My special thanks go to the participants from 16 countries in Asia, and the resource persons. Your presence here reconfirms the commitment of your governments and the organizations that you represent, to Gender Equality and Education for All objectives. It also bespeaks their readiness to make concrete steps forward to achieve the Dakar EFA Goals.

My sincere thanks also go to the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan. They have provided considerable support, time and energy in making this seminar possible in such a successful manner. Earnest support and understanding expressed by Mr Noguchi, the Director General of the National Federation, who is a former colleague of UNESCO, and the hard work of his team are indeed greatly appreciated. I would also like to note that we have received very kind cooperation from the National Women's Education Centre, the Asia Cultural Centre for UNESCO, and the Kyoto International Conference Centre. The fact that the heads of these institutions are members of the Japanese National Commission was not just a coincidence. I am glad to see the faces of our friends, including Ms Ohno, the President of the National Women's Centre, the colleagues of ACCU, and Professor Chiba, another former UNESCO colleague, here today. We really appreciate their cooperation, advice and help. The present regional seminar is a result of joint efforts and good will of many of these and other partners and

friends. I sincerely hope that our close and friendly working relationship will be further strengthened not only through this seminar, but also in our future activities.

As stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in [the] Declaration, without distinction of any kind" (Article 2), and "Everyone has the right to education" (Article 26). Moreover, as the signatories of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the 168 States party "commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms." In particular, Article 10 of the convention stipulates equality of men and women in the field of education.

More than 50 years has passed since the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it is more than 30 years since the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. However, women and girls worldwide are not enjoying equal rights to education. Such unfair distinction still widely prevails in spite of the fact that the world recognises that investment in girls and women's education yields high social and economic returns, and that every consideration for national development calls for the education of women and girls.

Since its earliest days, UNESCO dedicated itself to eliminating all forms of discrimination in education. Girls and women are one of the most targeted population groups in this endeavour. Naturally, UNESCO has been actively participating in the ten year United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), launched in conjunction with the Dakar World Education Forum in April 2000. The initiative is a UN system-wide response to the urgent needs for education for girls. Increasing their participation and improving quality of education for them, constitutes an integral and essential element in the global effort for poverty reduction and social development. For UNESCO, it is an important complementary programme to Dakar follow-up activities for elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015.

One of the important contributions of UNESCO to the UNGEI since its launch is the working document "Gender Equality in Basic Education: Strategic Framework". My colleague, Koto Kanno, will brief you on this document later this morning. This strategic framework document is meant to complement the UNGEI's sharply targeted objective of enhancing participation of girls in school education, by adding gender equality perspectives, and underlining the expanded vision of basic education and the concept of life-long learning. The document is also meant to serve as a conceptual basis and provide practical guiding principles to pursue our work for Gender Equality in Basic Education.

It must be recognized that ensuring and protecting women and girls' right to basic education is not just about ensuring equity of opportunities and access. Women and girls do not simply need access to status quo education - they need access to education that is safe, relevant, empowering and useful. Gender Equality is not simply a state where there are no gender gaps and inequity in school enrolment and literacy rates. A Gender Equality perspective reaches beyond access issues, and even quality issues, in basic education, and further, beyond training of women for employment and income generation activities.

On the understanding that gender is a socio-cultural construct, education for gender equality aims to transform gender relations, so that both women and men enjoy the same opportunities to achieve their potential and to create new partnerships between the genders, based on mutual respect, dialogue, and sharing public and private roles and responsibilities. The challenge of achieving gender equality in basic education, therefore, includes boys and men, as well as girls and women.

Against this background, the Dakar Framework for Action drew special attention to women and girls' education and gender equality in education. The Dakar Goal V relates specifically to the gender issues. It reads as follows:

> *"Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving Gender Equality in Education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to achievement in basic education of good quality."*

In Asia, the situation of women and girls' education and gender equality and equity in basic education appears to vary. On the one hand, in the South Asia sub-region, gender gaps are still wide in primary education and even in literacy rates. On the other hand, in other parts of the same region, countries have achieved, or are about to achieve, universal primary education. Gender gaps no longer exist in those countries, or are at a negligible level in terms of literacy and access to primary education. However, even in the latter countries, it appears that the perspective of "Gender Equality" is not often clearly spelled out in their education policies and programmes, and gender discrimination still remains. For example, there are gender-biased attitudes of teachers and parents towards girls' education, gender biased teaching and learning materials and curriculum. Guidance for girls' further study is based on the conventional views of girls and women - that girls and women's place is at home, therefore they should study home economics, or that girls and women are good in "soft" disciplines such as literature and arts, and not suitable for science and engineering. Such tendencies have been observed both in developing and developed countries in the region. Thus the question of Gender Equality still remains largely un-addressed. Further efforts are indeed required in order to achieve Gender Equality in education by 2015.

For UNESCO, Education for All is the overall priority of the organization. In the education sector, I am pleased to inform you that basic education is the priority of the upcoming two year programme cycle, 2002 - 2003. Our key objectives are to ensure the attainment of the six goals laid out in the Dakar Framework for Action.[4]

Allow me to remind you that the nature of our work in the UNESCO Education Sector is "policy advice, intellectual co-operation, development of normative instruments and ... We are enjoined to be a laboratory of ideas, a standard setter, a clearing house, a capacity builder and a catalyst for international co-operation."

Thus, in addressing the Dakar Goal V, UNESCO's headquarters, regional bureaus, cluster offices, country offices and institutes will be working together, collaborating closely with multilateral and bilateral agencies.

Our strategy to ensure gender equality in education is three-pronged:

- **Advocacy and sensitization**. Advocacy is essential in order to reach and raise awareness of the target population at all levels - girls, women, their families, teachers, community leaders, extension workers, government officials, law makers – to change attitudes and behaviour towards girls and women's education. UNESCO will provide technical assistance in developing strategies for community-level sensitization for gender responsive lifelong learning, and disseminate information on good practices.
- **Support for policy development**. Past experience indicates that gender issues should be tackled through an interdisciplinary approach, including social, cultural, and economic elements. Available data and research on gender equality in basic education are generally limited, incomplete, or under-utilized. UNESCO will intensify its efforts to build relevant capacity and help governments and lawmakers to translate their commitments into sound policies and concrete action on the basis of solid research and data analysis.

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4. Dakar Six Goals include:

i. expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children

ii. ensure that by 2015 all children--particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities--have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality

iii. ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes

iv. achieve a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults

v. eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality

vi. improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensure excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

- **Promotion of gender-responsive education delivery systems**. In order to increase the participation of girls and women, education delivery systems should be flexible and open, without sacrificing quality and relevance to their everyday life. UNESCO will continue to encourage its Member States to link formal and non-formal education delivery systems so that girls and women can transfer from one system to another at any stage of their lifelong learning process.

In order to achieve gender equality in basic education, to meet the challenge of attaining the Dakar Goal V, UNESCO considers that a certain regional cooperative mechanism or network will be useful. Through linking and connecting institutions and individuals engaged in gender sensitive education, we can share experiences of different countries, and make better use of resources available in the region. The existence of a regional mechanism will often be instrumental for effective coordination of different entities' activities within a country. The regional mechanism will enable inter-regional cooperation and exchanges with other existing regional networks and programmes in the relevant fields. I am pleased to inform you, in this regard, that we have invited the representative of the Forum for African Women Educationalists to this seminar to learn from their experiences.

We need your wisdom and innovative thinking backed by your rich first-hand experiences to achieve gender equality in basic education, through regional cooperation, and inter-regional cooperation.

The agenda of the seminar in front of us is rather heavy. We have to work hard in order to come up with concrete recommendations and conclusions within three days. I count on your initiatives and power, both intellectual as well as physical, and look forward to fruitful discussions and exchanges. On behalf of UNESCO, I will make sure that we will closely attend to the follow-up to this seminar, as we are looking forward to bringing changes in real terms, and not just in words.

With this, we shall now start the Seminar.

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